

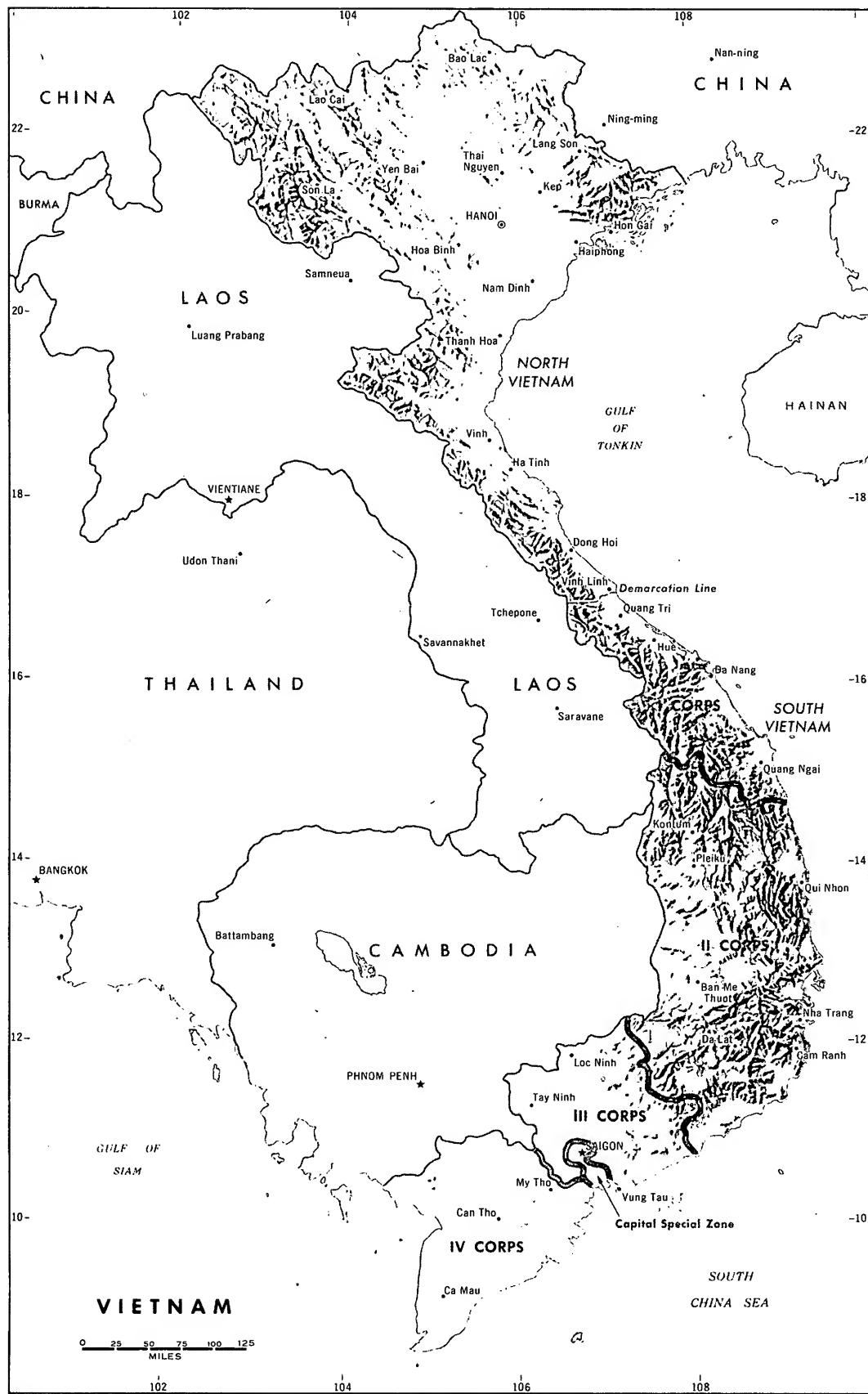


The President's Daily Brief

19 March 1969



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~~Top Secret~~ 50X1



20 March 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF
19 MARCH 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

The number of MIG-19s to arrive in North Vietnam from China has risen from six reported last night to 16. Ten additional aircraft flew from unidentified Chinese airfields to Kep this morning. Five were flown by North Vietnamese pilots and five by Chinese pilots. [redacted]

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[redacted] These MIG-19s will join an inventory which, as of mid-March, included 49 MIG-21s (20 still in China) and 115 MIG-15/17s (87 based in China).

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The military situation has remained relatively quiet over night. [redacted]

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MIDDLE EAST

There was another exchange of fire on the Israel-Jordan border this morning. Two Israeli border patrolman were injured. As of 7:00 AM EST the Suez Canal area was quiet. (Press)

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Prime Minister Golda Meir told Ambassador Barbour that Israel could not accept any recommendation from four power talks which included the USSR and France. If such recommendation was acceptable to the Arabs, it would, by definition, be so adverse to Israel's interests that its refusal would be certain. She asked that the US hold off on substantive four-power talks and take a reasonable time (some weeks) to discuss the situation with Tel Aviv. She felt certain "nothing terrible" would happen in the near future in terms of an outbreak of war.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

SOVIET UNION - COMMUNIST CHINA

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A Soviet radio broadcast has, indeed, reminded Peking of Soviet nuclear might, as an article in last evening's Washington Star by Victor Zorza points out. Moscow has chosen to do so through an unofficial propaganda medium--a radio outlet which has been consistently extreme and scurrilous with broadcasts to China (it has compared Mao to a monkey king and has charged that Mao's chief lieutenant was having an affair with Mao's wife). Because this device was used we do not regard the implied Soviet threat as a serious statement of intent but the Russians will not mind if it gives the Chinese some food for thought. (Source: Analysis)

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

The conversation between Ambassador Bunker and President Thieu on Monday shows the extent to which Thieu has considered the problem of dealing with the Communists and of working out a settlement with them. His statements to Ambassador Bunker exuded confidence, but they also reflected a sober understanding that some hard bargaining lies ahead. Thieu gave every impression, however, of being ready for some horse trading with the Communists.

On the subject of private talks with the Communists, Thieu was most forthcoming, agreeing to bilateral US-Hanoi talks, or four-way talks to include the NLF. [redacted]

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[redacted]
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Thieu's realistic assessment of what talks with the Communists will entail was highlighted by his remark that "Hanoi is not going to abandon the baby in the marketplace," a reference to his judgment that North Vietnam will insist on guarantees for the status of the Liberation Front before agreeing to pull its own troops out of the South. Thieu told Ambassador Bunker that he was prepared to offer the Communists a variety of ways to enter the political life of South Vietnam, including not only participation in the regular elections scheduled over the next few years, but even a special national election in which they could participate.

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In sum, Thieu seems, on the eve of the opening of private discussions, to have a confident attitude and at least a general idea of what he wants from the enemy and what he is prepared to give in return.

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The North Vietnamese will probably respond to our bid for opening bilateral private talks by demanding three-way talks, excluding the GVN. There is no way of telling how long they might stick on the three-way demand. Eventually they will probably fall back to a four-way formula. They probably will not budge from their four-way demand or take up substantive issues until they have nailed down a solid role for the Front as the prime representative of the Communist side on matters affecting South Vietnam.

Thus, they are unlikely to agree at first to any scenario in which US-DRV talks are being held on such matters as withdrawal, while GVN-NLF talks are going on regarding political issues in South Vietnam. This sort of an arrangement might be worked out later, after four-way talks have been held and the competence of the Front to deal with political matters related to South Vietnam has been acknowledged by the US.

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According to recent intercepts, the USSR is still sending rail shipments to North Vietnam via China. The press report on 15 March that the Chinese had closed their borders to such shipments clearly was an exaggeration. Any holdup at the time may have been temporary or a localized problem.

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There are persistent signs that major Communist forces may soon begin coordinated attacks throughout the II Corps - Saigon area, unless pre-empted by intensified allied spoiling operations. Prisoners taken on 18 March say they were scouting approach routes in preparation for a multibattalion attack on Saigon's outskirts slated for 22 March. In addition, communications intelligence reflects enemy preparations for a new phase of combat. Except for an isolated incident of terror which wounded some US servicemen, Saigon itself remained fairly quiet. Six large rockets fell on a Vietnamese military training center near the Tan Son Nhut Air Base causing light casualties.

The rocket attack at Da Nang yesterday highlighted coordinated Communist harassing attacks throughout the southern three provinces of I Corps. Casualties were relatively light, however, except where a sharp battle developed several miles south of Da Nang. There was little action nearer the DMZ, and reports that another North Vietnamese regiment had recently moved into Quang Tri Province have proved to be erroneous.

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MIDDLE EAST

Israel will reject the US proposals on the Middle East which Secretary Rogers recently discussed with Foreign Minister Eban, according to an article published today in Tel Aviv by a well informed Israeli journalist. The journalist noted that the proposals had been "softened" after Eban objected to them but that "Israel is not prepared under any circumstances to accept that softened position."

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EUROPE

The Gallup poll for March published today shows that the lead of the Conservative Party (52.5 percent) over the Labor Party (34 percent) declined by four points since February. This marked the fourth straight month in which Labor has risen. Furthermore, Prime Minister Wilson's personal performance in the poll showed an increase of 3 percent while Heath's declined from 34 to 32 percent.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

PAKISTAN

Pakistan moved closer to the imposition of martial law today with the home minister's announcement that governors in East and West Pakistan are to take "preventive and punitive" measures to quell disorders. Since the army is the only force strong enough to implement such orders, the pronouncement has a hollow ring unless the government intends to back it up with troops.

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